

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

December 18, 2001

Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to you to express our deep concern about recent reports that specialty care services at the VA Medical center in Newington, Connecticut will possibly be transferred to the VA Medical Center in West Haven.

From discussions our respective staffs have had with VA officials at the Newington facility, we understand that while no final decisions have been made in the matter, the transfer of these services is among the options the VA is considering to offset budgetary shortfalls.

We are deeply troubled by this idea – as preliminary or incomplete as it may be. We believe it will have a serious impact on literally thousands of veterans who rely on these services throughout Connecticut and western Massachusetts.

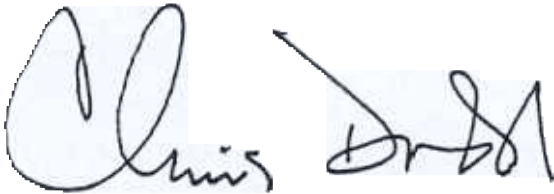
Over the last several days, each of our offices has heard from many veterans and advocates for veterans who fear they will no longer have access to specialty services like cardiology, podiatry, oncology and respiratory care through the Newington facility. Many veterans live in the far reaches of the state, and are personally unable to travel the distance to West Haven. Still other veterans feel they will not be able to rely on an already overwhelmed VA shuttle transportation system.

Other veterans, and their advocates, have raised legitimate questions about how the West Haven facility will be impacted by this transfer given the existing waiting periods and long lines for services at that facility.

Mr. Secretary, we recognize the difficulties involved in meeting budgetary goals. We also know how important it is for the VA to be efficient in its work. But because we are convinced it will place greater hardships on veterans and their families, we cannot support this plan. We ask that you seek out other, alternative ways to meet the budgetary deficit – ways that will maintain the specialty services at Newington.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and please let us hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
United States Senator



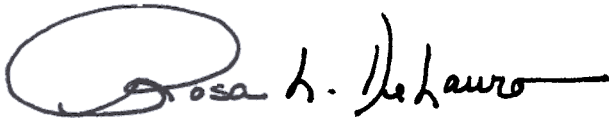
JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN
United States Senator



JOHN B. LARSON
Member of Congress



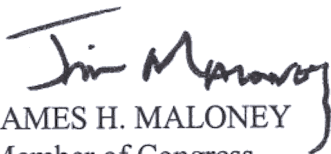
ROB SIMMONS
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CHRISTOPHER SHAYS
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JAMES H. MALONEY
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NANCY L. JOHNSON
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